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The JOURNAL of OPEDA



Advancing professionalism among employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture

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This second issue of The Journal of OPEDA focuses on awards, chapters, performance, and professionalism.

We are happy to announce here that Claude W. Gifford is the winner of this year's Professional-of-the-Year Award. He is a great credit to USDA and to OPEDA, and those of us in the field of information services are extremely proud of him.

As recipient of the National Honor Award, I am deeply grateful for the trust other officers have placed in me and for this special recognition. It is a satisfaction to recognize others with various awards. We are honored by Chairman Ford's acceptance of the National Public Service Award. He has been a powerful and trusted friend of Federal employees during his 17 years in the Congress, and is taking the lead in a turnaround toward protecting their benefits.

We also are pleased to honor the Agricultural History Branch with a special award in recognition of their longtime record of dedicated service. And it is a pleasure to recognize three chapters--two for outstanding activities and one chapter membership award. We hope that in the future we will have the privilege of handing out many more membership awards.

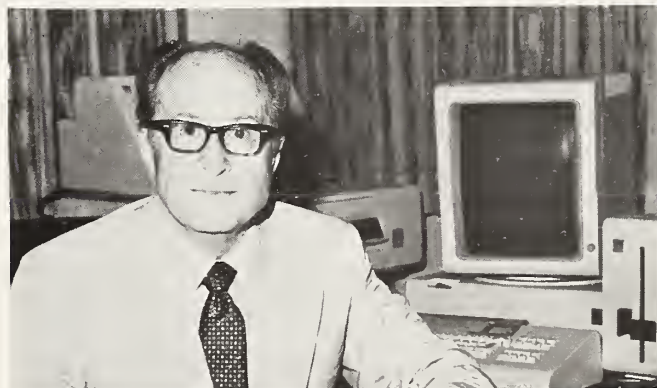
We commend also to your reading the articles on pay, performance, and professionalism. We invite you to send us your thoughts on issues of concern so that we can help bring to all OPEDA members the kinds of information which help the most.

Otis N. Thompson, Jr.
Otis N. Thompson, Jr.
President of OPEDA

CLAUDE W. GIFFORD WINS PROFESSIONAL AWARD

OPEDA's Professional of the Year for 1983 is Claude W. Gifford, Deputy Director of USDA's Office of Information.

He was selected by the National Council's 28 Members over two outstanding Department scientists--Dr. Walter Fiddler of Philadelphia and Dr. Werner Lipton of Fresno, California. This is the first time in the five years since the Professional-of-the-Year Award was established as part of OPEDA's 50th anniversary observance in 1979 that a member and employee in the Washington, D.C., area received the Award.



Winner Claude Gifford uses high technology for high-level communications.

In recognition of this distinction, a plaque and letter of commendation were presented to Claude Gifford at a Sunday evening dinner opening the annual meeting of OPEDA's National Council Oct. 2-5.

Claude Gifford was brought into the Department of Agriculture in June 1971 as its Director of Information and served in that position until the agency was reorganized in 1977. In his Deputy Director role, he directs about 140 information specialists

and support staff, and provides regular guidance to information directors in about 20 principal USDA agencies who supervise communications activities of more than a thousand specialists and support staff throughout the United States.

His professionalism and dedication to public service have been a constant inspiration to information workers in the Department of Agriculture and to other national leaders. His nomination for the Professional-of-the-Year Award was strongly supported by letters from 12 prominent persons who have worked closely with him during his 12 years in USDA. They included former Secretary of Agriculture Clifford Hardin who brought him into the government, and former Secretary Earl Butz.

Also a Senior Management Analyst of the Office of Management and Budget, three top officials of the Government Printing Office, the Staff Director of the Joint Committee on Printing, an Associate Commissioner of the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Director of the General Services Administration's Consumer Information Center, the present Director and former Director of the USDA Graduate School, and the former Director of USDA's Office of Governmental and Public Affairs.

Claude Gifford received one of USDA's highest honors--a Distinguished Service Award--in May 1983. He has been similarly honored by many communication and trade associations.

He grew up on a farm in Rock Island, Illinois, was an active member and had leadership roles in 4-H and Future Farmers of America, received early education at Muscatine (Iowa) High School and Muscatine Junior College, and was graduated with highest honors in Agricultural Economics and Journalism from Iowa State University.

After serving two years as assistant extension editor at University of Illinois, Claude joined the staff of Farm Journal magazine in 1948 and became Economics Editor, Farm Policy Editor, and Director of the Editorial Page. In 1968, he helped to plan and launch TOP OP, a management magazine sponsored by Farm Journal for Class I and Class II farmers and served as its Economics Editor until he accepted USDA's call to become Director of Information in 1971.

CHAPTERS ARE OPEDA'S FRONT LINE

With more than 90 percent of USDA's employees and retirees located in the states, it is highly appropriate that OPEDA's services be made available to them through local units. That's why chapters were established on a very broad scale throughout the U.S. in the 1960s.

More than 70 OPEDA chapters were started between June 1963 and August 1969, and most of them are still serving their members. No new chapters were organized in the 70s, but a total of seven new ones have been set up beginning in 1980.

The most recent new chapters include West Central Alabama, Alaska, Del-Mar-Va, Central Illinois, Iowa, Sooner (Okla.), and Central Texas. Consolidations of four chapters into one took place in each of the states of New York and North Carolina. Other consolidations are needed.

The role of chapter officers--which usually include a president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer--is to recruit new members, maintain occasional contact with all of its members, plan meetings and programs of interest to members and other USDA employees, and speak for its members in carrying on business with the National Office and other officers.

Each of the 28 National Council Members represents all members of OPEDA in a region of one, two, or more states and is responsible for all chapters in that region. Chapters can have a direct line to the National Office but the Council Members should be kept informed of any actions to be taken.

The first chapter organized in the 60s was and is, the Southeast Alabama Chapter at Enterprise, chartered in June 1963. The first president of that chapter was Bill B. Faulk, SCS technician, who is now in his sixth year as National Council Member for that region (Alabama and Mississippi). It is a small chapter but has always continued to be active through that 20 years. It also had a Professional-of-the-Year Award winner--Charles H. Harper--in 1980.

Three other early chapters organized by employees of ARS at its regional headquarters and still active are ERRL at Philadelphia, New Orleans No. 1, and WRRL at Albany, Calif. The Beltsville, Maryland, Chapter was started about the same time.

BUCKEYE CHAPTER'S PLAN FOR GROWTH

by David F. Berna, President

A very successful businessman summed-up the art of selling with this simple statement: "Have what the people want, when they want it, at a price they are willing to pay." By applying these ideas, the Buckeye Chapter of OPEDA has been able to increase membership in 1983 by about 30 percent.

We have "what the (USDA) people want"--an organization that will represent them on Capitol Hill. Department of Agriculture employees also want information on pay, job actions, professionalism, insurance, and retirement programs. This information is supplied by the OPEDA News and the Journal of OPEDA.

To have OPEDA available, "when they (potential new members) want it," our State Membership Chairman appointed 17 unit membership chairmen to serve the various agencies in the state and some of their units. They give short talks on OPEDA at meetings of their respective units, distribute membership material, sign up new members, and answer questions about OPEDA.

The second part of this program is regular mailings of OPEDA brochures and information on employee issues to USDA employees through the internal mail system. By using these two programs, the Buckeye Chapter is feeding membership information to USDA employees "when they want it." Seldom do employees object to the cost of OPEDA membership. It is a good deal for the money.

About 2,640 USDA employees are located in Ohio. Our desire is to have all of them as members, which, of course, would not be realistic. So, we in Ohio fall back on the ideas promoted by the successful businessman: "We have what the people want, when they want it, at a price they are willing to pay."

CHAPTER AWARDS, SPECIAL SERVICE AWARD

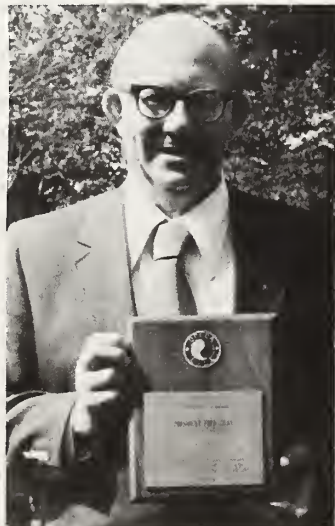
Three OPEDA chapters honored at the National Council meeting include the Buckeye Chapter in Ohio, MOPEDA Chapter in Michigan, and the ERS Chapter in Washington, D.C. A Special Public Service Award also was presented to the Agricultural History Branch of the Economic Research Service in USDA.

A Chapter Activity Award presented to David Berna, President of the Buckeye Chapter (left, below), carried the citation, "For Revitalizing the Buckeye Chapter and Establishing a Membership Recruiting System that Is Paying Off Handsomely." (See article in adjoining column.)

A Chapter Activity Award also was presented to Fred Gray (left, center), President of the ERS Chapter serving employees in USDA's Economic Research Service in Washington. Its citation reads, "For Outstanding Leadership, Professionalism, Promotion, Rebuilding, and Research in Support of Chapter Members and Agency Employees."

The only Chapter Membership Award earned during the last year went to MOPEDA Chapter, which enrolled 41 new members in that period. The plaque presented to President Dwight Quisenberry (right, center) cited the Chapter "For Outstanding Success in Recruitment of and Service to Its Members."

The Special Public Service Award to the Agricultural History Branch of ERS presented to Branch Chief Wayne Rasmussen (right, below) has the following citation: "For Its Exemplary Standards of Professionalism in Providing an Institutional Record of Historic achievements of the Agriculture of the United States."



PORTRAIT OF AN EDUCATIONAL STATESMAN



"Milton S. Eisenhower, Educational Statesman" is the title of a book published by Johns Hopkins University Press and released on September 15, 1983, which was Dr. Eisenhower's 84th birthday.

Milton Eisenhower was a name of prominence in the founding of OPEDA in 1929. He had been Director of Information for USDA about a year when he and other top officials established the Organization of Professional Employees of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. He was one of the six members of its first Executive Committee. In June of this year, OPEDA President Thompson presented to Dr. Eisenhower an Honorary Member Award with an engraved plaque.

He continued as USDA Director of Information until 1942 and also was Land Use Coordinator for the Department during the latter years of that service. In 1943 he was named president of Kansas State University and began building one of the most distinguished records of educational achievements and public service in the history of our Nation.

After seven years at Kansas State, Dr. Eisenhower was elected President of Pennsylvania State College in 1950. During his six years there, the institution was changed from a college to a university, faculty and student quality were upgraded, salaries were raised 75 percent, and 55 million dollars worth of buildings were constructed.

Dr. Eisenhower topped off his career as an educational executive by serving as President of The Johns Hopkins University from 1956 to 1967. The Garland Report gives a full account of achievements in those 11 years. As President Emeritus, he was called back to active duty as President by Johns Hopkins and served another two years between terms of his successors.

Throughout his years as a university executive, Dr. Eisenhower took on about a hundred additional responsibilities for which he was elected, appointed, or assigned.

For example, when his older brother, Dwight, was President of the United States, Milton was his confidant. He also was Special Ambassador and Personal Representative of the President for Latin American Affairs for those eight years. He wrote a book about his Latin American experiences entitled "Wine Is Bitter," which became a best seller in 1963.

Another result of his educational and international experiences was being recognized by 33 American universities and six in foreign countries which conferred honorary doctorate degrees upon him. The presidents of seven foreign nations have honored him with their highest decorations of distinction.

He wrote another book, "The President Is Calling," in 1974, which is an assessment of the eight presidents he served and came to know intimately. It also is an evaluation of the U.S. Constitution, laws, and traditions affecting the presidency. He served on a dozen presidential commissions and was chairman of five of them. He had a special interest in the President's Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. In 1980, he founded and still actively heads the Eisenhower Foundation for the Prevention of Violence.

He recently retired from directorships in 13 financial and business institutions and has served in that many more. He has been elected to the following honorary fraternities: Phi Beta Kappa (scholastic), Phi Kappa Phi (scholastic), Alpha Zeta (agriculture), Delta Sigma Pi (commerce), Sigma Delta Chi (journalism), Omicron Delta Kappa (leadership), and Alpha Phi Omega (service).

And now in 1983, Dr. Eisenhower has achieved the ultimate in distinction through a book written by Dr. Stephen E. Ambrose and Dr. Richard H. Immerman with the title "Milton S. Eisenhower, Educational Statesman."

WORD PORTRAIT OF A PROFESSIONAL

Excerpts from letters supporting Claude Gifford for 1983 Professional-of-the-Year Award.

William J. McQuaid, Senior Management Analyst, Office of Management and Budget:

"Mr. Gifford has distinguished himself not only by his own professional excellence, but in his ability to inspire others in achieving a high level of performance. Claude is meticulous in his work and selfless in his service to the government and the public."

William J. Barret, Deputy Public Printer of the U.S., Government Printing Office:

"Thomas Wolfe once wrote that 'If a man has talent and cannot use it, he has failed. If he has a talent and uses only half of it, he has partly failed. If he has a talent and learns somehow to use the whole of it, he has gloriously succeeded, and won a satisfaction and a triumph few men ever know.' Claude Gifford fits this latter category like a glove."

Thomas J. Kleis, Staff Director, Joint Committee on Printing, U.S. Congress:

"I find Claude to be a person of great ability who has the thoroughness and perseverance to get the job done and get it done right. As Public Affairs Officer, he has a thorough understanding of the unique relationship between the Joint Committee on Printing and USDA."

Earl L. Butz, Dean Emeritus of Agriculture, Purdue University (former Secretary)

"He 'knew the territory' to be served by USDA, he knew the personnel in the media clear across the Nation and had their respect and their confidence, and he knew when 'to charge' and when 'to retreat.' In short, he was one of the most effective information directors I have known. Always professional, always alert, always effective, he got the job done."

Clifford M. Hardin, Center for the Study of American Business, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri (former Secretary of Agriculture):

"Claude Gifford is an excellent writer and author. He possesses a knowledge and understanding of American agriculture that can only be described as remarkable. Materials that were produced under his supervision consistently showed spontaneity, insight and good judgment."

John B. Holden, President, Beacon College, Wash., D.C. (former Director of Graduate School):

"Claude Gifford is a team worker, never seeks recognition or credit for himself. He is a writer, editor, and creative thinker. Claude is a problem solver, big or small."

Henry Lowenstern, Assoc. Commissioner, Office of Publications, Bureau of Labor Statistics:

"Claude is an outstanding civil servant who has the public interest in mind in every action he takes, who is dedicated to the free flow of information and sound publishing."

Teresa Nasif, Director, Consumer Information Center, GSA:

"He has always carefully reviewed Consumer Information Center's distribution costs and benefits with an eye to both protecting and promoting USDA's information program interests."

Robert J. McKendry, Assistant Public Printer for Production, GPO:

"I observe operating officials for publishing in every agency in government. Claude has no peer in this environment. Due to his untiring cost-conscious efforts, the Department of Agriculture has the best managed printing programs in government."

John D. Livsey, Jr., Director, Analysis and Review Staff, GPO

"He has offered his counsel to the members of the Joint Committee staff on several occasions and has consistently demonstrated a professional manner. Claude Gifford is a man that can be counted upon when assistance is required on any project."

James C. Webster, Webster Communications Corporation (first Director of OGPA):

"Giff handled it for USDA with his usual competence and devotion to detail. The result, a new and better public affairs specialist standard for the entire government."

Edmund N. Fulker, Director, Graduate School, USDA:

"His new Mass Communications Committee has broadened the scope and content of courses, resulting in more than 300 adults in the Washington area taking communication courses."

THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONALS IN USDA'S MISSIONS

Speaking to the National Council on that subject, Raymond D. Lett, Executive Assistant to Secretary Block, emphasized the point that "Career employees--professionals like yourselves and those you represent--are vital links in USDA's structure." He said he could share their concerns because he was a USDA employee for several years (Staff Director of the State ASCS office in Illinois).

This Administration had a different mandate from the American people on what they want from their government, Lett said. It took a while to work our way through the normal strains of a new system, but we are through that now.

Referring to a recent article in the Wall Street Journal, which had high praise for four Federal employees giving outstanding service (One of the four is Dawson Ahalt of USDA, an OPEDA member.), Lett remarked that the Secretary and other top officials are well aware of the reservoir of talent in USDA. "As we filled positions," he said, "We created a good blend of career employees with long experience and expertise and persons from political backgrounds for additional knowledge and flexibility to help implement the new Administration's goals."

He told the Council he was impressed with their dedication and professionalism. The combined efforts of all professionals help make it possible for U.S. agriculture to maintain its reputation as one of our Nation's greatest assets.

Even though we are on the road to economic recovery, the size of federal deficits and high costs of farm programs require continued emphasis on budget controls and reduced spending. We must continue efforts to find new ways of doing our jobs more effectively with smaller staffs and smaller budgets, Lett added.

He said the Secretary's priorities continue special focus on research, conservation, and international trade. To help achieve our goals in these and other major programs, we must encourage individuals, private industry, and local and state governments to assume greater responsibilities.

Lett explained that agriculture policy is at a crossroads. The current farm bill expires in 1985. The Payment-In-Kind (PIK) program bought a little time, but we need to address long-term issues now, he urged.

Your help and leadership are needed, along with that of many thousands of other professionals, to solve effectively the problems we face in the production and utilization of the bounty from our land, Lett emphasized.

"We are proud of your accomplishments on behalf of the American people, and of the tremendous respect for the expertise and abilities of you and other USDA employees all across the country," he concluded.



Ray Lett (right) accepts plaque for Secretary Block from OPEDA President Otis Thompson.

Ray Lett, Executive Assistant to Secretary Block, spoke for a second time during the Council meeting, filling in for the Secretary who was called to the Hill, and gave the Secretary's speech at the OPEDA town meeting in Jefferson Auditorium.

WHERE SHOULD OPEDA STAND?

by

Werner J. Lipton (Former Member of OPEDA's National Council)
Horticultural Crops Research Laboratory, ARS-USDA, Fresno, California

(The following expresses the views of one member of OPEDA in response to a request for articles to be published in this issue of The Journal of OPEDA.)

Not being the reticent type, I welcome and am grateful for the opportunity to express in The Journal of OPEDA my opinion on "Where should OPEDA stand?"

At the outset, we should remember that OPEDA stands for Organization of Professional Employees of the Department of Agriculture. The key words are Professional and Department of Agriculture. Thus, the primary mission, by name and charter, of our organization is to serve the interests of professionals, whether forester or scientist, secretary or administrator, technician or accountant within the Department. I believe that the members of OPEDA have let OPEDA stray from this primary mission by design and indifference. As a result, OPEDA is less effective in improving the working life of its members than it might be.

By design, I mean that members have urged its representatives, the Members of the Council, to pay undue attention to issues that affect all federal employees. (Social Security coverage, pay issues, and retirement rules are a few examples.) Of course, these are important to each one of us. However, these issues are essentially union-type issues that are addressed most effectively by unions with tens or even hundreds of thousands of members. Why should OPEDA use its small resources to become a pale imitation of a union? Is that what we really want to accomplish with our dues?

By indifference, I mean that too many of our members express no opinion on what they think OPEDA should be, where it should stand, where it should go. All members have the address of the National Office, and Members of the Council and Chapter Presidents also are easy to reach. If these officers are to serve their constituents well, the members of OPEDA must let them know what kind of an organization they want.

Does the membership want a watered-down union in the guise of a professional organization? If the membership wants OPEDA to be a union, let us be honest about it and make OPEDA a union, but a first-class one, not a pale imitation. If the membership wants OPEDA to be a professional organization, the course I favor, then let us concentrate our efforts on professional issues and mainly within the USDA. We must make the choice to be honest with ourselves and to use our very limited resources most effectively.

So, where should OPEDA stand? What should OPEDA be doing?

Some of my examples will come from the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) because that is where I work and that is the agency I know about. However, I am sure that analogous situations exist or will exist in other parts of the USDA.

OPEDA should see to it, possibly via Directive 464.9, that employees who face major changes in the type of their assignments and who are, therefore, demoted through no fault of their own, are evaluated for correctness of their grade level only after they have been given adequate time to demonstrate their competence in the new job. Immediate downgrading under such circumstances, is unfair and undermines professionalism.

OPEDA must continually insist that USDA employees are not merely pawns in a game, or cogs in a machine, but individuals and professionals who deserve and demand to be treated as such.

You ask, should not OPEDA take a stand on issues that affect all federal employees? Yes, it definitely should, if the major issue is professionalism.

OPEDA should strive to make educational leave a right for qualified employees, not a favor granted from above. An arrangement similar to the excellent training and development program for researchers in ARS should be implemented for all USDA and, eventually, all federal employees who have any type of professional responsibilities.

Also, on the national scale and intimately connected with professionalism, is OPEDA's long, and continuing effort to maintain the integrity of the Hatch Act. This is an issue on which OPEDA, to its credit, stands apart from unions. It is an attempt that should not be diluted by duplicating work that is done better by unions. It is a crucially important effort, because politicizing the civil service from below is just as intolerable as politicizing it from above.

Obviously there are plenty of issues to tackle that are worthy of OPEDA. These are issues that would help advance professionalism within the USDA, and that would inspire self confidence among USDA professionals. Thus, we would be regarded as respected and dedicated employees with lively minds, not just as so many slots on an organization chart. Slots can be manipulated like pawns, professionals cannot.

Where should OPEDA stand? I believe it should stand where it can be most effective and most helpful to the careers of its members; it should concentrate on professional issues and primarily issues within the USDA.

However, before OPEDA can take a stand as an organization, each individual member must take a stand and convey that stand to the Council and the officers. Each member must decide whether OPEDA is to be split between two houses, one union, one professional, or whether it is to stand solidly and advance successfully as an organization dedicated to professionalism.

The time for decision is here.

WHAT SUGGESTIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR OPEDA?

We would like your reaction to Werner's suggestions. Even as a professional organization, can we properly ignore what we call the "bread-and-butter issues"? Most of those issues do affect all Federal employees, but they are very important to USDA employees. Can we successfully continue to promote both professional and "bread-and-butter issues," as we have in the past?

We don't expect all of our 9,000 members to respond, but we surely would like a good cross section of reaction to the article and any other suggestions you may have to improve the services of OPEDA. We also welcome articles for future issues of The Journal of OPEDA on some subject related to our mission of professionalism.

Walter John, Executive Director of OPEDA,
Editor of OPEDA News, and Editor of The Journal of OPEDA